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Transmission line linking Spokane, Grand Coulee approved

VANCOUVER, Wash. – The Bonneville Power Administration has officially decided to build the Grand Coulee-Bell 500-kilovolt transmission line project, an 84-mile line connecting Spokane with Grand Coulee, Wash.

The decision, signed by BPA Administrator Steve Wright, approves the first transmission line construction project under the agency's infrastructure expansion program to relieve congested transmission paths in the region.

"The President's National Energy Policy calls for an increase in the nation's energy infrastructure. I am pleased BPA is building this transmission line, which is essential to delivering energy reliably and safely to homes and businesses in the Pacific Northwest," said Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham.

"This project is critical to maintaining the quality of electrical service in the region," said Mark Korsness, project manager. "Our ability to fulfill our supply obligations to our customers and to deliver power exactly where it's needed will markedly improve once this line is completed."

Since the mid-1990s, the transmission corridor west of Spokane, Wash., has become increasingly constrained. In early spring and summer, the amount of power needing to pass through this path can exceed the carrying capacity of the existing lines. "Under those conditions the system could overload, violating industry safety and reliability standards," Korsness explained. "The increased capacity provided by this project significantly eases those problems."

Construction of the line will begin this February with completion expected in November 2004. The \$152-million project is financed by BPA and completely paid for through BPA sales of transmission services.

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Most of the line will be built on an existing right-of-way between BPA's Bell Substation in Spokane and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's 500-kV switchyard adjacent to Grand Coulee Dam. "Building on existing right-of-way minimizes environmental impacts," Korsness added. The new line replaces an older, lower capacity line.

During a year-long analysis of the project, BPA met with and received comments from elected officials, government agencies, area tribes, and local property and homeowners. "Response from local residents in the Spokane area led to the alternative that BPA chose," Korsness said. He added that BPA would continue to work with landowners to minimize the impacts during construction. Attention will also be paid to minimizing the visual impacts of towers and reducing land use issues in parks, residential and farm areas.

In the first phase of the project, BPA will remove the existing 115-kV wood pole transmission line before replacing it with a 500-kV line on steel towers. A new switchyard will be added at Bell substation, and the existing switchyard at Grand Coulee will be expanded slightly.

For more information on the record of decision and the project, visit BPA's Web site at www.transmission.bpa.gov/projects, or call (888) 276-7790.

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